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ABSTRACT

An increasing number of student places is only one measure of openness in a university. The institution must continue to investigate which groups of people are prevented from even applying, and why this is so. Although the number of applicants for 1976 was high, it included a large percentage of previous applicants, while the number of new applicants decreased. A survey was conducted in 1974 of those people receiving the admissions manual, including unsuccessful applicants of the year before. Over 6,400 responses were analyzed for patterns in these characteristics: occupation, sex, age at completion of previous education stages, age at time of response, and region. The survey also analyzed the reasons for not applying and used these categories: the nature of the course offered, teaching methods, personal and domestic factors, work situation, alternate plans for education, and others. (MSE)

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People who decide not to apply to the Open University

- an enquiry into their reasons and social characteristics

A second and final report on this subject
prepared for the Admissions Committee and
the Public Relations Committee of the
Open University

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1. Introduction

One of the tasks confronting the Open University's Planning Committee in the late sixties was to estimate the potential level of demand for such a university. According to their calculations there was a large pool of people in Britain who would be willing and able to benefit from this new institution.[1] From a national survey conducted on their behalf they concluded that the Open University could expect between 34,000 and 150,000 applicants in its first year and contingency plans were made to deal with such numbers. In fact 40,000 applications were received and the numbers declined over the next two years (Table 1). The findings which are presented in this report stem from an investigation carried out by the Survey Research Department in conjunction with the Admissions Office to discover the reasons why people decide not to apply to the Open University.

TABLE 1 Number of applicants to the Open University

Year of application	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976
Number of applicants	40,817	34,222	30,414	33,220	49,550	50,340	49,956

Source: University statistics

As a result of the upswing in the number of applicants from 1973 onwards (stimulated possibly by the publicity surrounding the O.U's first graduates), concern about people who decided not to apply appeared to have decreased. An increase in the number of student places seemed the major goal. However, this constitutes only one side of "openness" and the University must continue to investigate which groups of people are prevented from even applying, and why this is so. And it may be that the University has been lulled into a false sense of security. Although the number of applicants for 1976 is still high, it includes an increasing number of previous applicants. Not only are the number of new applicants decreasing, but the number of enquiries are also substantially down. This decline comes before the full impact of increased fees will have been felt, since the amount of the increases does not appear in the "Guide for Applicants". Research into those who do not apply may, therefore, assume increasing importance.

Reasons for not applying can be at a very basic level. People who do not know that the O.U. exists will certainly not apply. Those who have heard of the O.U. but believe that 'A' levels are required for entry, or that study is full-time, are unlikely to apply. However, the different levels of knowledge and awareness between various social groupings and the trends over the years have been reported elsewhere and do not concern us here.[2] The present investigation was based on those people who received a "Guide for Applicants" but who did not complete and return the enclosed application form. These people, who will be referred to as "non-appliers", are particularly important. They have heard of the Open University, they have demonstrated an active interest in it by sending for a "Guide", they have received detailed information concerning the O.U's teaching system, yet they do not take the final step and complete an application form. The question "Why did you decide not to apply to the Open University?" is a meaningful one for them as it involves a conscious decision on their part.

2. Data Collection

2.1 A pilot survey was conducted in 1973. A reply-paid card was designed which enquired into the reasons for not applying, and which was quick and easy to complete. One of these cards was placed in every fifth "Guide for Applicants, 1973" and those who decided not to apply to the University were asked to complete and return the card. As a result of this survey 1,036 completed cards were analysed and the findings reported.[3]

2.2 The major survey was conducted in 1974. A revised card was placed in each "Guide for Applicants, 1974" (See Appendix 1). The Admissions Office distributed 135,809 Guides (31,089 being sent automatically to unsuccessful applicants from the previous year) and 49,550 applications were received, thus leaving 86,259 potential respondents. In fact some 6,600 cards were completed and returned, of which 6,439 were analysed. Because many "Guides" were distributed to institutions rather than to individuals and many cards would remain undiscovered, it makes it impossible to calculate a true response rate. Furthermore there is no way of measuring how representative the group of respondents was and therefore the findings outlined in this report should be interpreted as providing some indication of the range of reasons given by a self-selected group of non-appliers. However, previous studies by the Survey Research Department have shown that the closer a person gets to becoming an Open University student, and the more progress he makes as a student, the more likely he is to respond to questionnaires. Therefore, although it may be unwise to generalise the present findings to all non-appliers, our respondents might well represent that group which came closest to actually applying.

2.3 As the findings from the main study are very similar to those from the pilot study, many of the conclusions drawn in the present report are the same as those drawn in the first report. However, these conclusions now take on more weight since they confirm the direction of the pilot study and are based on five times the number of respondents.

3. The Findings

3.1 Who are the non-appliers?

3.1.1 The people who decide not to complete an application form can be described as early drop-outs from the O.U. It is obviously to be expected that a certain proportion will act in this way, after considering the facts in the "Guide for Applicants", their domestic and work circumstances, their educational preparedness, etc. There must be some concern within the University, however, if it can be shown that this early form of drop-out is significantly greater for certain social groups. In this section we compare the characteristics of the group of non-appliers with those of the applicants for 1975 courses.

3.1.2 Occupation

In Table 2 we compare the occupations of non-appliers with those of applicants for 1975 courses. Due to differences in the national structure of occupations, we consider men and women separately.

TABLE 2 A comparison of non-appliers & applicants by occupation within each sex

Occupation	Men		Women	
	Non-appliers n=2956 %	Applicants n=29,449 %	Non-appliers n=3041 %	Applicants n=21,289 %
01 Housewives	-	-	45.3	33.7
02 Armed forces	3.8	4.1	0.1	0.1
03 Administrators & managers	3.3	6.4	0.4	1.2
04 Education	9.5	21.8	12.9	25.7
05 Professions & Arts	10.3	10.0	9.3	12.3
06 Qualified scientists & engineers	5.1	5.1	0.2	0.2
07 Technical personnel	10.4	15.6	2.1	2.6
08 Electrical, metal & allied trades	10.1	6.8	-	0.2
09 Other manufacturing, farming, mining etc.	6.7	5.7	0.8	0.5
10 Communications & transport	4.0	3.1	0.4	0.7
11 Clerical and office	13.4	8.7	16.8	16.9
12 Sales & service	9.7	7.9	4.1	2.3
13 Retired, not working	13.7	4.7	7.4	3.7
14 In institutions	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.1

If we use application figures as the baseline, men in Occupational Categories 08 (Electrical, metal and allied trades), 11 (Clerical and office workers), and 13 (Retired, not working), are particularly over-represented among the non-appliers. Furthermore, when one adds together the number of men in those categories containing the majority of manual workers (08, 09 and 10), then they represent 20.8% of non-appliers but only 15.6% of applicants. On the other hand, men in Occupational Categories 03 (Administrators & managers), 04 (Education) and 07 (Technical personnel) are under-represented among the non-appliers.

The pattern for women is somewhat different. Non-working women, i.e. 01 (Housewives) and 13 (Retired, not working), are over-represented among the non-appliers, as are those in sales and personal service occupations. Women in Occupational Categories 03 (Administrators & managers), 04 (Education) and 05 (Professions and Arts), are under-represented among the non-appliers.

The over-representation of those in the "Retired, not working" category deserves further comment here. This category contains retired people who may feel that they are too old for O.U. study and also the temporarily unemployed who may feel that they cannot afford the tuition fees. However, it also contains full-time students and in fact some 30% of those in this category stated that they had decided to take a full-time course instead of the O.U. One would, therefore, expect this occupational category to be somewhat larger for the non-appliers than for applicants.

3.1.3 Sex

Table 3 shows a similar analysis by sex alone. Women are clearly over-represented among the non-appliers.

TABLE 3 A comparison of non-appliers and applicants by sex

Sex	Non-appliers n=6375 %	Applicants n=50,742 %
Male	48.7	58.0
Female	51.3	42.0

3.1.4 Terminal age of education

Table 4 shows that, on average, non-appliers completed their full-time education at an earlier age than applicants. For instance, 47.4% of the non-appliers had finished their education at 16 or earlier, but only 35.4% of the applicants.

TABLE 4 A comparison of non-appliers and applicants by terminal age of education

Terminal age of education	Non-appliers n=6,170 %	Applicants n=50,742 %
15 and under	24.1	16.7
16	23.3	18.7
17	13.6	13.2
18	11.5	12.5
19	3.4	5.1
20	3.8	4.6
21 and over	20.3	29.3

3.1.5 Age

Those aged under 21 and those aged over 45 are over-represented among the non-appliers (Table 5).

TABLE 5 A comparison of non-appliers and applicants by age*

Age	Non-appliers n=6,325 %	Applicants n=50,742 %	Age
Under 21	7.3	2.[illegible]	Under 21
21-24	17.3	22.8	21-25
25-34	39.1	43.[illegible]	26-35
35-44	18.2	19.[illegible]	36-45
45-54	10.7	9.0	46-55
55-64	4.9	2.2	56-65
65 & over	2.5	0.5	66 & over

* Exact comparison is not possible due to slight differences in the age categories used for the two groups

3.1.6 Region

The regional distribution for non-appliers is in fact very similar to that for applicants (Table 6). In proportionate terms, those from Northern Ireland and London are most under-represented among the non-appliers and those from the South East the most over-represented. The 44 respondents who were resident abroad were excluded from this analysis.

TABLE 6 A comparison of non-appliers and applicants by region

Region	Non-appliers n=6273 %	Applicants n=50,742 %
01 London	10.4	14.6
02 South	9.1	8.5
03 South West	7.0	6.2
04 West Midlands	7.9	7.8
05 East Midlands	6.7	6.0
06 East Anglia	9.9	9.1
07 Yorks	7.2	6.8
08 North West	13.8	11.9
09 North	4.1	4.9
10 Wales	3.6	4.3
11 Scotland	9.5	9.6
12 N. Ireland	1.4	2.6
13 South East	9.2	7.5

3.1.7 Summary

From our national surveys we know that women, older people, those with a low terminal age of education, and those in the "lower" social classes are less likely to have heard of the O.U.[2] In general people in these groups who have heard of the O.U. are more likely to have inaccurate information about the nature of the O.U. The present findings suggest that when people in these groups send for a "Guide for Applicants" they are also more likely not to complete and return the enclosed application form.

We, therefore, seem to have pin-pointed another area where differential "drop-out" takes place. Whether this is true or not depends upon the extent to which our respondents are representative of non-appliers. However, our experience on other O.U. research projects would suggest that many of the differences we have found would be diminished rather than exaggerated by differing response rates within the various demographic groupings. For example, those in manual occupations and those with a low terminal age of education are less likely to complete and return questionnaires.

In a later section we look for differences between the reasons given for not applying by the groups we have considered here. However, we begin by looking at the overall response pattern.

3.2 Factors affecting the decision not to apply

3.2.1 The card was designed essentially as a check list. Individual factors which might have affected the decision not to apply were grouped under five main headings and a sixth heading was included to allow for those people who sent for the "Guide" for purposes other than a personal application.

Table 7 shows the percentage of respondents who ticked one or more factors under each of the six main headings. Respondents were encouraged to mark more than one answer and many did so, which explains why the total adds up to more than 100%. Almost two thirds of the respondents mentioned some personal or domestic factor and around 60% indicated some other plans for their continuing education.

TABLE 7 The percentage of respondents who mentioned any factor under a given heading

Section	Main Study - 1974 n=6439 %	Pilot Study - 1973 n=1036 %
1. The nature of the courses offered	39.4	39.2
2. The teaching methods	39.9	39.0
3. Personal/domestic factors	64.8	61.7
4. Work situation	26.4	27.5
5. Other plans for education	58.9	49.0
6. Guide requested for other reasons	25.5	28.0
7. Other reasons for not applying	12.2	-

3.2.2 Table 8 gives the percentage of respondents ticking individual factors under each of the section headings. As in Table 7, we have included figures from the pilot study. The two sets of figures are very similar and differences that do exist can largely be explained by changes in the wording on the card.

TABLE 8 Factors affecting the decision not to apply

	Main Study - 1974 n=6439 %	Pilot Study - 1973 n=1036 %
1. The nature of the courses offered		
a) No courses offered in subjects in which I am interested	18.8	15.2
b) Insufficient opportunity to specialize in a particular subject	13.8	14.6
c) Courses too difficult	6.2	4.2
d) Not enough details about courses in the "Guide"	8.8	12.2
e) Possible non-recognition of O.U. degree by professional bodies	6.5	8.8
2. The teaching methods		
a) Would not be able to attend Summer School	29.4	23.7
b) No BBC2 television available	6.4	9.9
c) No VHF radio available	7.3	10.1
d) No study centre near home, unable to attend	5.8	5.7
e) Would prefer face-to-face tuition	6.1	7.1
3. Personal/domestic factors		
a) Care of children	16.5	21.1*
b) Care of other dependents	3.1	
c) Other domestic demands	9.1	
d) Not enough time available for studying each week	29.3	29.4
e) Would take too long to get a degree	12.6	14.5
f) Health difficulties	2.9	2.1
g) Financial commitment too great	24.6	18.3*
h) Likely to be overseas in January 1975	5.2	4.5
4. Work situation		
a) Teacher in probationary year	3.1	5.1
b) Have changed job/job responsibilities	7.9	7.7
c) Type of job/hours of work will make O.U. study very difficult	11.9	11.0
d) An O.U. course/degree would not help my job prospects	6.8	7.1
5. Other plans for education		
a) Decided to do a preparatory course/studies this year	7.7	8.8
b) Decided to do other part-time course this year	17.7	16.5
c) Decided to do other full-time course this year	6.8	6.0
d) Plan to apply to O.U. in a future year	43.6	27.8*
6. The Guide for Applicants requested for reasons other than wanting to apply for admission		
a) General interest in the O.U.	24.0	24.9
b) Professional interest in the teaching system of the O.U.	2.0	4.8*
c) For reference purposes e.g. librarian	1.7	3.4

* Figures not strictly comparable due to slight changes in wording on the card.

3.2.3 The main points arising from the figures in Table 8 would seem to be as follows:

(i) The three most frequently mentioned factors were "Would not be able to attend Summer School" (29.4%), "Not enough time available for studying each week" (29.3%), and "Financial commitment too great" (24.6%).

(ii) Around 44% of respondents planned to apply to O.U. at some stage in the future.

(iii) Almost a quarter of the respondents said that they sent for the "Guide" out of general interest rather than with the intention of applying.

(iv) Some 23% of respondents mentioned "Care of children", "Other domestic demands", or both.

(v) The next highest categories were "No course in desired subject" (18.8%), "Inability to specialize" (13.8%), "Too long to get a degree" (12.6%), and "Type of job makes O.U. study difficult" (11.9%).

3.2.4 What do these answers mean and what would the O.U. have to do to attract these non-appliers? Let us consider the three most mentioned factors, "Summer School", "Time" and "Money".

Many of the non-appliers felt unable to attend Summer School due to domestic and work factors. Of those who said they would be unable to attend, 30.1% also mentioned problems with care of children and 16.5% mentioned difficulties due to their type of work, both figures being well above the average. Some 40% of those with Summer School problems also mentioned money and it became obvious from written in answers that for many it was the cost of Summer School that was the problem. Voluntary attendance at Summer Schools would obviously help to attract these people to the O.U. However, if Summer Schools were not compulsory then local authorities might well be less prepared to give grants to O.U. students attending them. This would make them inaccessible to very many people. If Summer Schools were abolished this might result in another group of non-appliers who at present enrol on O.U. courses <u>because</u> there are Summer Schools.

If Summer Schools are to remain compulsory then certain changes could be made as we outline below. However, there are strong counterarguments for many of the suggested improvements.

(i) Grounds for Summer School excusal could be extended still further to assist mothers with young children and people in particular occupations. Such grounds would have to be clearly laid out in the "Guide for Applicants". However, a lenient excusal policy could result in the withdrawal of local authority grants or reduce the credibility of an O.U. degree.

(ii) Creche and nursery facilities could be provided to assist mothers with young children. This would be expensive and it might actually prevent mothers gaining full academic benefit from a Summer School.

(iii) A number of weekend schools might be preferable to a week long Summer Schools. However, organisational problems, shortage of suitable staff and buildings, etc. would almost certainly rule this out as a practical alternative, except for a small number of courses.

(iv) The "Guide for Applicants" should give more details concerning the likelihood of obtaining a grant for Summer School fees from the various LEA's. It is apparent that many of the non-appliers felt certain they would have to pay the fees themselves. These facts would dispel some worries but, because many local authorities are now cutting back on the amount of support they will offer, some prospective applicants would be reminded of the large personal financial commitment involved.

Those who mentioned "Not enough time available for studying each week" were more likely than other respondents also to mention "Type of job/hours of work would make O.U. study very difficult", "Other domestic demands", "Care of children" and "Have changed job/job responsibilities". Each of these factors suggest a practical reason for the lack of time. The only short-term solution to this problem would seem to be to offer courses which required less study each week. However, if the standard of the O.U. degree was to be maintained, it would take these people even longer to obtain a degree than at present. Ironically this group was also slightly more likely to mention the length of time taken to get a degree as a reason for not applying. The problem of "Not enough time" will never lead to a single definitive solution because this answer contains within it a variety of higher order reasons. As the vast majority of people have at least ten hours of leisure time, i.e. when they are not working, then the lack of time may reflect an unwillingness to give up other family and social activities for O.U. study, which in turn relates to how strongly they want a degree and how much use it will be to them. Similarly a person who envisages great difficulty with the academic content of the course may rationalise his reason for not applying as "lack of time" - which may be partly true as he would have to spend much more than ten hours a week on his studies. In general, then, further probing of this answer would be necessary before appropriate action could be decided upon.

However, some information can be obtained by looking at answer patterns. In Figure 1 we take those who mentioned "time" and show the percentage who also mentioned certain other factors. We have also indicated how the two factors may be connected.

FIG. 1 The relationship between "Not enough time" & other factors

Base = All respondents mentioning lack of time N=1887	%	Possible connections
No course offered in subjects of interest	10.5	Not prepared to make time for a course perceived to be of limited value for vocational purposes or of little interest
Insufficient opportunity to specialize	12.3	
Possible non-recognition of degree by professional bodies	5.1	
O.U. course/degree would not help job prospects	8.7	
Courses too difficult	7.5	Not got the time which would be required to overcome learning difficulties
Type of job/hours of work make O.U. study very difficult	24.1	Tired after work - need time to relax. Hours of work such that will miss programmes and tutorials. Need to do work at home in evenings etc.
Care of children	22.9	Domestic demands mean lack of time and energy. Unfair to family to spend time studying
Care of other dependents	4.2	
Other domestic demands	16.6	
Changed job/job responsibilities	4.1	Time needs to be spent settling into and doing well at new job
No study centre near home, not able to get to study centre	6.7	Can not find extra time/money etc. necessary for getting to tutorials

As indicated earlier, financial problems appear to be closely linked with difficulties involving Summer School attendance. Those who mentioned finance were also more likely to mention "Care of children", "No VHF radio", and "No study centre near home, not able to get to study centre", all of which could be linked with finance either in terms of cause or effect. Financial problems are likely to be exacerbated by the increase in O.U. fees in 1976 and the various schemes instituted by the University to help students meet these fees are to be welcomed. Such schemes will have to be well publicized early on and be easily accessible to attract this group of non-appliers.

3.2.4 Almost a quarter of the respondents said that they had not intended to apply for admission but had merely sent for a "Guide" out of general interest. This is an understandable response but the situation is complicated by the fact that 90% of them also mentioned other factors as affecting their decision not to apply. One could exclude these other factors from the analysis on the grounds that these people never intended to apply anyway but it was decided to leave them in on the following grounds:

a) These people might have sent for a "Guide" only out of general interest because they already knew these other factors would prevent them from applying.

b) Many who only sent for a "Guide" out of general interest might in fact have decided to apply had they not come to realize the importance of these other factors.

c) Some 40% planned to apply to the O.U. in some future year.

3.3 Courses required

People who decided not to apply because no courses were offered in subjects in which they were interested were asked to write in the subjects they would have like to study. In all 1,544 subject choices were mentioned by 1,212 people and these choices are summarized in Table 9.

TABLE 9 The subjects which the non-appliers wanted the Open University to provide

1. Arts

a) Languages

European/Modern languages	124
French	71
German	37
Spanish	14
Italian	11
Other	31
TOTAL LANGUAGES	288

c) History

History	61
Ancient History	13
European History	5
British History	5
Other	18
TOTAL HISTORY	102
TOTAL ARTS	7??

2. Law

Law	104
LLB	5
Criminal Law	3
Other	7
TOTAL LAW	119

3. Business Studies & Management

Business Studies	40
Accountancy	32
Management studies	23
Marketing	9
Commerce	5
Personnel Management	4
Other	20
TOTAL BUSINESS STUDIES & MANAGEMENT	133

4. Social Science

Economics	28
Geography	27
Psychology	17
Anthropology	10
Sociology	6
Politics	5
Other	10
TOTAL SOCIAL SCIENCES	103

5. Applied Social Studies

Social Work	7
Child Care	3
Social Services	3
Youth & Community	2
Other	3
TOTAL APPLIED SOCIAL STUDIES	18

b) English

English Literature	57
English	43
English Language	21
Other	4
TOTAL ENGLISH	125

d) Other Arts

Art	54
Music	45
Theology	36
Archaeology	32
Folklore/mythology	5
Drama	4
Linguistics	10
Other	22
TOTAL OTHER ARTS	208

6. Science

Zoology	20
Biological Sciences	18
Botany	17
Astronomy	9
Metallurgy	7
Geology	5
Chemistry	4
Geomorphology	3
Other	28
TOTAL SCIENCE	111

7. Medical

Medicine	27
Pharmacy	9
Nursing	9
Anatomy	5
Physiology	5
Other	12
TOTAL MEDICAL	67

8. Technology

Electronics	17
Electronic Engineering	15
Construction/Surveying	12
Mechanical Engineering	11
Engineering	11
Transportation	8
Civil Engineering	8
Other	21
TOTAL TECHNOLOGY	103

9. Others

Education & related	33
Maths & computing	14
Food & related	17
Agriculture & related	30
Architecture	10
Secretarial	4
Photography	5
Librarianship	4
American studies	4
Other	46
TOTAL OTHERS	167

In the report of the Planning Committee it was acknowledged that the O.U. could only provide a limited range of courses and the answers to the present survey clearly show that a mammoth institution would be necessary to satisfy everyone's needs.[4] However, the pattern of responses to this question both reflects previous decisions on course provision and suggests ways in which it could be extended in the future:

(i) There are certain subject areas which are popular but which do not appear in the O.U's plans for future course provision at the moment. These include foreign languages, law, medicine and the more vocational business/management courses.

(ii) Other frequently mentioned subjects are in fact in the O.U's curriculum such as English, History, Music, Psychology, Economics, Electronics, Chemistry etc. Their mention would seem to reflect the desire for specialized degrees in traditional subject matter areas. It could be interpreted as a vote against general Foundation Courses and the limited range of higher level courses. In fact 30% of those who said there were no courses of interest also ticked the option "insufficient opportunity to specialize".

(iii) The preponderance of applicants for Arts and Social Science courses at the O.U. can not be explained by the shortage of suitable courses in the Science and Technology area. Four times as many of the non-appliers mentioned the absence of suitable courses in the former subject areas as in the latter.

(iv) It would seem that some people were a little over-optimistic if they were indeed searching through the "Guide" to see if the O.U. provided courses in such esoteric subjects as greenkeeping, light aircraft design, the royal family and numismatics! However, while the O.U. can never hope to provide courses for all of these people it could try to guide them towards more appropriate institutions.

3.4 Other responses

If their particular reason for not applying was not given on the card, respondents were encouraged to write it in. Seven hundred and eighty three, 12% of all respondents, actually did so. The reasons were diverse and no single reason was given by more than 1% of all respondents. However, the results are shown in Table 10 for the following reasons:

a) Although small in percentage terms they are fairly large numerically

b) they may easily have been mentioned by more if they had been printed as an option

c) they suggest possible areas for future investigation.

TABLE 10 Other reasons for not applying

	NO.		NO.
Too old	41	Having a baby	26
Too young	36	Too long before studying	25
O.U. year not suitable	43	College won't allow it	5
Change in marital status	21	Not enough credit exemptions	30
Moving house, no settled address	79	Turned down by O.U. before	17
Don't want two/any Foundation Courses	44	Broadcast times not suitable	34
No quiet place to study	19	Want a B.Sc.	24
Spouse's studies come first	24	Not got application for distance study	34
"Guide" wanted for other reasons	29	Other	196
Would not get a place	77		

Some points arising from the other responses are given below:

(i) Of those who felt they were too old or too young, the oldest was 88 and the youngest was 15.

(ii) The O.U. year was considered unsuitable due to clashes with other courses but was mainly mentioned by those connected with farming, tourism and other seasonal trades.

(iii) The associate student scheme may cater for those who wish to proceed immediately to higher level courses.

(iv) Several people, mainly women, said that only one partner could manage to study at one time and their spouse's studies were being put first.

(v) Amongst those wanting the "Guide" for other reasons was a Dutch professor who was doing O.U. courses by buying the books and an "O.U. student" at Maryland University in America wanting to know about higher level maths courses.

(vi) Quite a number did not apply because they felt that it was too late to get a place. The first such replies arrived before the end of February and this suggests that the true level of demand may be considerably larger than the total number of applicants in a given year.

(vii) Several people commented that the adverts for the O.U. were misleading, particularly in relation to cost, difficulty and time required for study.

(viii) A small number in fact only wanted details about higher degrees and did not realize these were obtained separately.

3.5 A comparison of the responses made by selected groups

In section 3.1 we identified certain groups which, when one considers the application figures, are over-represented or under-represented among the non-appliers. In this section we look at these groups to see whether they also exhibit differences in their reasons for not applying.

3.5.1 Occupation

In Table 11 we compare the responses of four occupation groups. For each group we have shown a) the percentage mentioning a given factor and b) the rank order of this factor in terms of a). We present below what appear to be the most salient points from this complex table.

(i) "No courses offered in subjects of interest" received high rankings for each group but was most important for administrators and managers, being mentioned by 28.4%. The pattern for "inability to specialize" was very similar.

(ii) The level of difficulty of the courses was most important for manual workers and housewives. As one might have expected, this factor had little significance for the education group.

(iii) "Possible non-recognition of the O.U. degree" was most important for manual workers (8.1%) and least important for housewives (2.9%).

(iv) Summer School attendance presented major difficulties for three of the groups, those in education being the exception. In percentage terms it was clearly housewives who were most affected, followed by manual workers.

(v) Difficulties in attending a study centre were more common for housewives than for any other group. The same was true for "care of children" but here the differences were far more dramatic.

(vi) The cost of O.U. study was less of a problem for administrators and managers but was of some significance to each group. In percentage terms, housewives were most affected followed by manual workers.

(vii) Around 20% of the education group were teachers in their probationary year. The O.U. specifically advises against attempting O.U. studies during this period.

(ix) Manual workers were most likely to feel that an O.U. degree would not help their job prospects. Those in the education group were least likely to feel this.

TABLE 11 The responses of four selected occupational groups

Reasons for not applying *	Housewives n=1381 %	Rank	Education n=674 %	Rank	Administrators & managers n=109 %	Rank	Manual Workers n=655 %	Rank
No courses of interest	14.7	5	15.4	3	28.4	2	22.0	5
Cannot specialize	10.8	7	13.9	5	20.2	4	11.9	6
Courses too difficult	8.9	10	.9	22	4.6	16=	9.8	8
No details in "Guide"	6.6	12	8.3	11=	11.0	9	9.2	9=
Non-recognition of degree	2.9	18	4.7	16	6.4	14	8.1	12
Summer School attendance	46.3	2	12.3	7	22.0	3	31.3	1
No BBC2	5.4	14	5.3	13	5.5	15	6.9	15
No VHF radio	8.3	11	7.1	12	4.6	16=	6.7	16
Study centre not accessible	9.1	9	3.1	18	3.7	18=	4.7	18
Prefer face-to-face tuition	5.7	13	4.2	17	8.3	11	7.2	14
Care of children	52.1	1	8.9	9	2.8	20	4.0	19
Care of other dependents	4.1	15	2.2	20	3.7	18=	2.7	20
Other domestic demands	11.2	6	8.8	10	9.2	10	9.2	9=
Not enough time	27.7	4	31.3	1	33.9	1	30.1	2
Degree takes too long	9.3	8	10.4	8	15.6	5	11.6	7
Health difficulties	3.2	17	1.3	21	0.9	21	2.1	21
Costs too much	35.5	3	14.5	4	11.9	7=	25.3	4
Likely to be abroad	2.8	19	5.2	14	7.3	12=	6.4	17
Probationary teacher	-	22	19.9	2	-	22	-	22
Changed job	1.2	21	13.2	6	11.9	7=	7.6	13
Unsuitable job	2.2	20	5.0	15	13.8	6	26.1	3
Degree won't help prospects	3.3	15	2.7	19	7.3	12=	8.4	11
Other educational plans								
Preparatory course	10.1		2.8		7.3		12.5	
Part-time course	13.5		16.0		20.2		19.4	
Full-time course	2.5		4.9		1.8		3.8	
Will apply to O.U. in future	42.7		50.3		39.4		43.2	

* See Table 8 for exact wording of reasons

(x) Turning to other educational plans, manual workers were the most likely to decide to take a preparatory course instead (12.5%). Administrators and managers (20.2%) and manual workers (19.4%) were most likely to opt for some other part-time course. Those in education were most likely to take some other full-time course (4.9%), followed by manual workers (3.8%).

(xi) A high proportion of each group planned to apply to the O.U. in the future ranging from 50.3% in the education group to 39.4% among administrators and managers.

Summarizing by occupational groups one could say that housewives and teachers were relatively happy with the courses which the O.U. offered. However, housewives were beset with practical problems concerning the cost and attendance at Summer Schools and study centres whereas teachers had problems concerned with job changes and, in particular, their probationary year. Administrators and managers and manual workers were more critical of the courses offered and both groups stressed that their type of work made O.U. study difficult. For manual workers problems with the academic level of the courses and with Summer School attendance were also frequently mentioned.

3.5.2 Sex

A similar analysis by sex is shown in Table 12. Men were more concerned than women about subject choice, inability to specialize, and the possible non-recognition of an O.U. degree. They were also more likely to mention job factors as one might have expected. Women were more likely to mention care of children, cost and problems with attendance at Summer Schools and study centres.

3.5.3 Terminal age of education

Table 12 also contains a comparison between those with a terminal age of education of fifteen or under and those who were aged twenty-one or over when they finished their full-time education. Those with a terminal age of education of fifteen or under were more likely to mention the difficulty of the courses, lack of VHF radio, inability to attend Summer Schools and study centres, cost, and problems due to their type of work. Those with a terminal age of education of twenty-one or over were more concerned about inability to specialize, possible non-recognition of an O.U. degree, job changes and the possibility of being abroad.

Those with a low terminal age of education were more likely to opt for preparatory study or some other part-time course and were less likely to be planning to apply to the O.U. in the future. Those with a high terminal age of education were twice as likely to be taking some other full-time course.

TABLE 12 Responses analysed by a) sex and b) terminal age of education

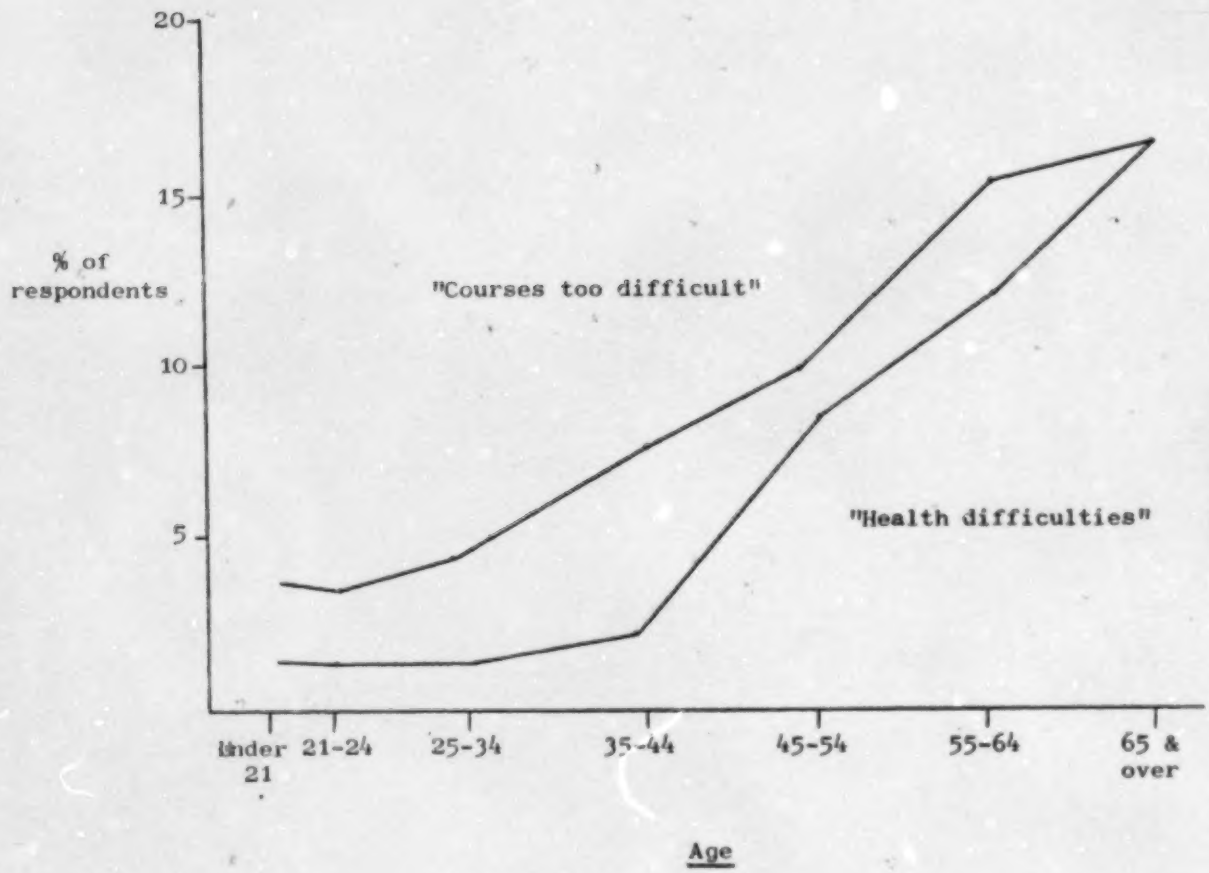
Reasons for not applying	SEX				TERMINAL AGE OF EDUCATION			
	Male n=3107		Female n=3268		15 or under n=1484		21 or over n=1255	
	%	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank
No course of interest	21.9	3	16.1	5	17.5	4	18.5	2
Cannot specialize	14.7	6	13.1	6	11.2	8	15.1	5
Courses too difficult	4.8	17	7.6	10=	13.8	7	1.4	22
No details in "Guide"	9.8	9	8.0	9	8.0	12	9.7	10
Non-recognition of degree	8.9	11	4.3	18	4.2	20	7.6	13
Summer School attendance	23.8	2	35.0	1	39.3	1	17.1	3
No BBC2	6.5	15	6.2	14=	6.7	14=	5.8	15=
No VHF radio	6.9	13=	7.6	10=	8.6	11	5.4	17
Study centre not accessible	4.4	18	7.1	12	7.4	13	3.3	19
Prefer face-to-face tuition	6.1	16	6.2	14=	6.3	16	4.4	18
Care of children	3.4	19	29.1	4	15.4	6	13.3	6
Care of other dependents	2.2	22	4.0	19	4.4	19	2.8	20
Other domestic demands	8.4	12	9.8	8	10.0	10	8.2	11
Not enough time	28.6	1	30.3	2	28.5	3	28.7	1
Degree takes too long	13.8	7	11.5	7	10.9	9	10.4	9
Health difficulties	2.5	20	3.2	22	4.9	18	1.8	21
Costs too much	19.9	4	29.2	3	30.6	2	15.9	4
Likely to be abroad	6.9	13=	3.7	20=	3.8	21	6.1	14
Probationary teacher	2.4	21	3.7	20=	.9	22	10.8	7
Changed job	10.3	8	5.7	16	5.8	17	10.7	8
Unsuitable job	9.0	10	4.9	17	6.7	14=	5.8	15=
Degree won't help prospects	17.6	5	6.7	13	15.8	5	7.3	12
Other educational plans								
Preparatory course	7.5		8.1		14.2		2.7	
Part-time course	20.9		15.0		18.8		13.8	
Full-time course	8.0		5.7		3.2		7.8	
Will apply to O.U. in future	43.7		44.1		39.6		47.4	

3.5.4 Age

Certain of the factors behind the decision not to apply seem directly related to age. However, the relationship is not a constant one.

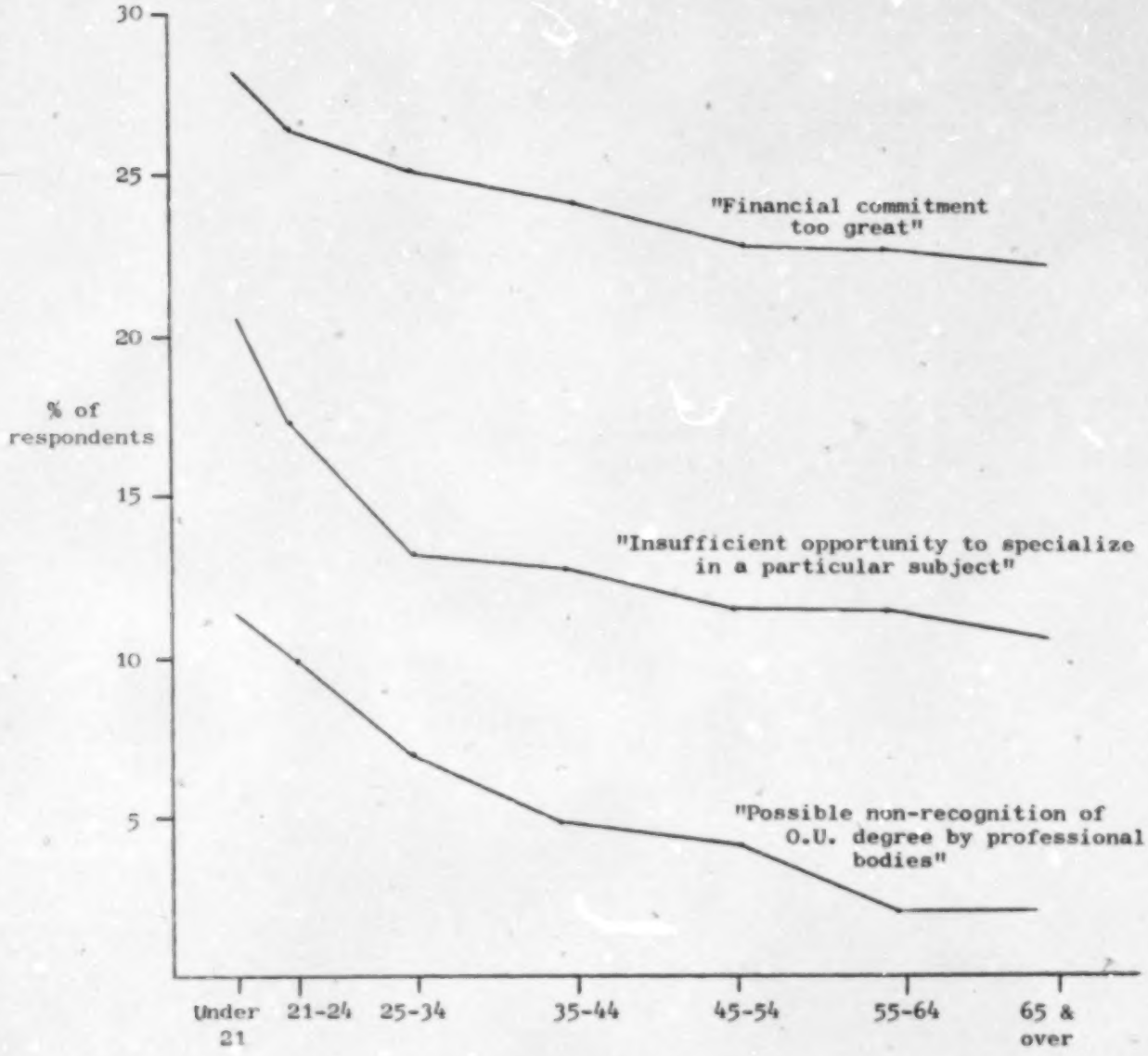
The frequency with which some factors are mentioned increase as the respondents get older. Figure 2 shows this for "Health difficulties" and "Courses too difficult".

FIG. 2 Reasons for not applying to the O.U.



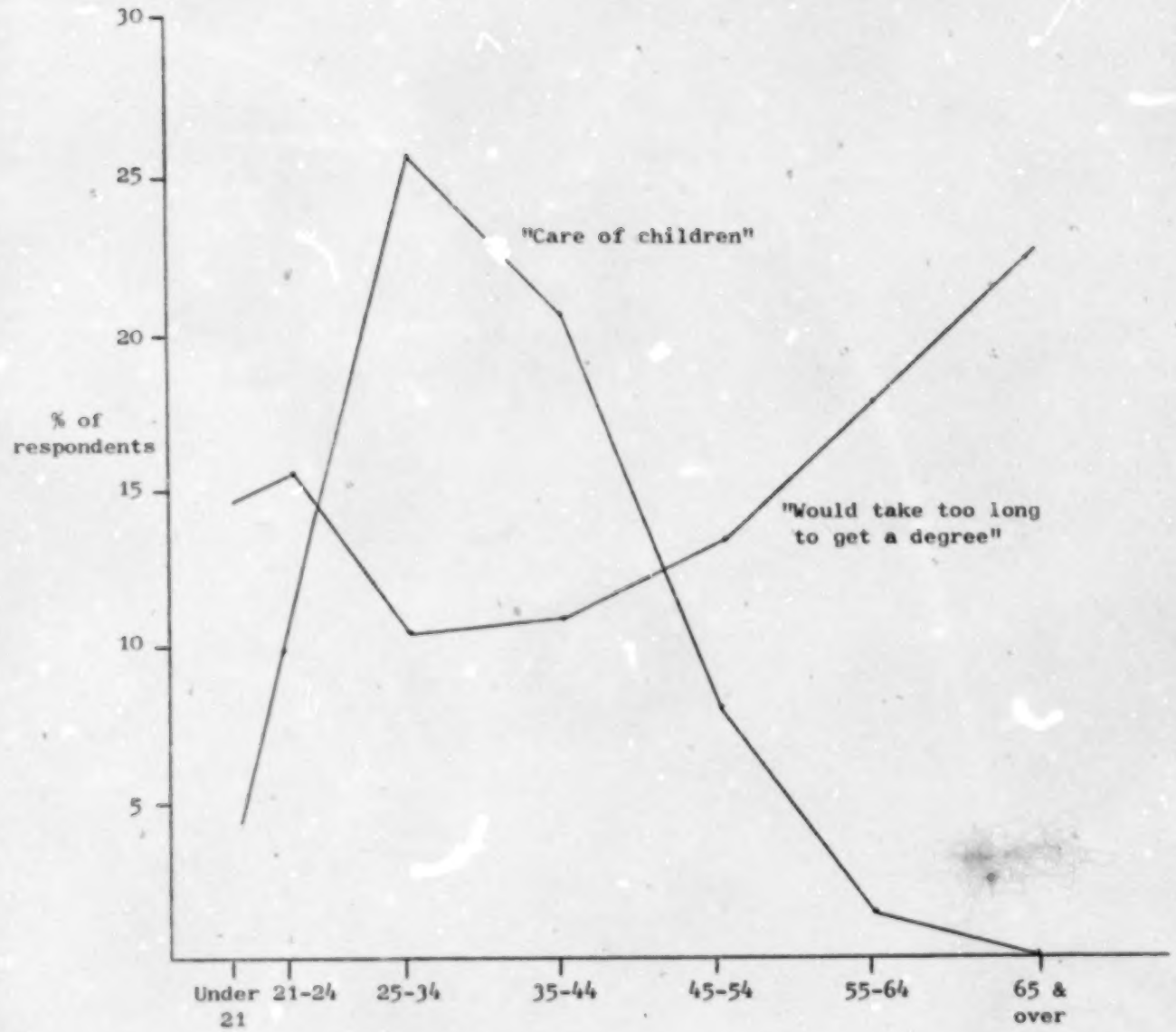
Other factors decline in importance with age. Figure 3 shows this for "Financial commitment too great", "Inability to specialize" and "Possible non-recognition of degree". Similar curves which have not been included are those for people who decided to do some other full-time or part-time course. However, the most dramatic example of this type of curve is that for plans to apply to the O.U. in the future. This declines from 50% of the youngest group to less than 10% of those aged 65 and over.

FIG. 3 Reasons for not applying to the O U.



In Figure 4 we illustrate two u-shaped curves. The length of time taken to get an O.U. degree seem to be of more concern to the very young and the very old, as one might have expected. Problems associated with the care of children are more important in the middle years and, although the peaks are at different ages, the same is roughly true for "Care of other dependents", "Other domestic demands", "Not enough time for study" and "Teacher in probationary year".

FIG. 4 Reasons for not applying to the O.U.



3.5.5 Previous applicants

We attempted to distinguish between those respondents who had previously applied to the O.U. by a) asking them directly and b) recording the date of return of the card. This information gave us two groups of previous applicants. Firstly those who had ever previously applied and secondly a group who had applied the previous year. The latter group returned the card so quickly that they must have been sent a "Guide for Applicants" by the Open University in advance of the normal date along with all other unsuccessful applicants from the previous year. To a large extent the reasons given by these two groups were very similar to those given by respondents who had never applied to the O.U. before. Table 13 contains only those reasons where differences emerged.

TABLE 13 Current reasons for not applying given by those who had applied previously

Reasons for not applying	Had applied to O.U. sometime in the past n=495 %	Had applied to O.U. last year n=422 %	Had never applied to O.U. before n=5262 %
No courses of interest	9.5	16.4	20.4
Cannot specialize	8.1	12.6	14.7
Courses too difficult	2.6	2.6	6.8
Summer School attendance	18.6	23.0	31.3
Care of children	14.1	11.4	17.0
Not enough time	30.1	26.1	30.1
Degree takes too long	12.7	17.3	12.8
Costs too much	20.8	19.9	25.3
Changed job	16.0	13.0	7.3
Other educational plans			
Part-time course	24.4	22.5	17.8
Full-time course	11.1	10.9	6.6
Will apply to O.U. in future	45.3	34.4	44.7

As one might have expected, those who had applied to the O.U. previously were less likely to be critical of the courses offered and had fewer practical problems. However, they were more likely to mention difficulties due to job changes. Previous applicants were also more likely to opt for alternative part-time or full-time courses, but those who had applied the previous year were less likely to be planning to re-apply to the O.U.

The absence of large differences may be due to inaccuracies in the division of the groups. For some respondents "applying" was equated with sending for a "Guide for Applicants" rather than with completing an application form. Others said that they had not applied previously but had obviously been sent a "Guide" as a previous applicant. For these reasons the data in Table 13 should be treated with some care.

3.6 The relative seriousness of various factors

So far in this report we have considered the most "important" factors to be those which were most frequently mentioned. However, as people were asked to tick all factors rather than just the most important one, the most frequently mentioned factor might in fact be just the most common subsidiary reason behind the decision not to apply.[5] The "importance" of a given factor can be approached from a different direction by looking at the frequency with which it is associated with plans to apply to the Open University. If a reason is seen as serious and enduring then the person is unlikely to be planning to apply in the future.

In Table 14 we show the percentage of respondents mentioning a given factor as affecting their decision not to apply who planned to apply to the O.U. in a future year. For example, of those who were not applying because they were teachers in their probationary year, 74.2% were planning to apply in a future year. This reason, then, appears to be a temporary one, as are problems due to changes of job, care of children and other domestic demands. However, while teachers are delaying their application by one year housewives may well be talking about several years, until children start school for instance.

Only 18.8% of those who mentioned "Would take too long to get a degree" were planning to apply in a future year. Unlike the reasons mentioned earlier this was not one that was likely to "go away". The nature of the courses themselves also provided lasting problems for many of the respondents. These included the level of difficulty, the choice of subjects and their effect on job prospects.

3.7 Some measures of the overall importance of the various reasons for not applying

We have discovered that some reasons are more frequently mentioned than others and also that some appear to be more serious or enduring than

TABLE 14 The % of respondents mentioning a given factor who planned to apply to the O.U. in a future year

Teacher in probationary year	74.2
Have changed job/job responsibilities	57.8
Other domestic demands	52.0
Care of children	51.9
Likely to be overseas in January 1975	49.4
Not enough time available for studying each week	48.5
Type of job/hours of work will make O.U. study very difficult	45.9
Not enough details given about courses in "Guide for Applicants"	45.0
No VHF radio available	44.4
No BBC2 television available	42.4
Financial commitment too great	41.1
Care of other dependents	41.1
Possible non-recognition of O.U. degree of professional bodies	40.9
Would not be able to attend Summer School	36.2
No study centre accessible	35.3
Would prefer face-to-face tuition	31.6
Health difficulties	29.4
An O.U. course/degree would not help my job prospects	25.9
No courses offered in subjects in which I am interested	25.4
Courses too difficult	21.7
Would take too long to get a degree	18.8

others. Obviously both of these dimensions are important when considering the general problem of non-appliers and so it is worthwhile looking at some measures which combine both types of information to produce a single measure of the relative importance of the various factors.

We took each factor and, by the use of quartiles, rated it as "High", "Medium" or "Low" in terms of a) the frequency with which it was mentioned by respondents and b) the frequency with which it was associated with plans to apply to the O.U. in a future year. This enabled us to place each factor in a 3 x 3 grid as shown in Fig. 5. From this grid one would conclude that the most important reasons were "No courses in desired subjects", "Inability to specialize" and "Too long to get a degree" as they were frequently mentioned and unlikely to be associated with plans to apply. "Likely to be overseas" and "Teacher in probationary year", on the other hand, were not major reasons as they were seldom mentioned and frequently associated with plans to apply.

The grid in Fig. 5 represents a useful way of looking at the data but its simplicity is gained by grouping data and hence it loses some accuracy. We can rank factors more accurately by considering each factor individually. We have done this in Table 15 by multiplying the response rate by the percentage not planning to apply in a future year and dividing by 100. By doing this we have weighted the "frequency" of a given response by its "seriousness". Using this weighted score the most important factors are Summer School, not enough time and the cost.

TABLE 15 The most frequently mentioned factors weighted by "seriousness"

Factor	a) Overall response %	b) Not planning to apply in a future year %	Weighted score = a) x b) / 100
Summer School attendance	29.4	63.8	18.8
Not enough time for study	29.3	51.5	15.1
Financial commitment too great	24.6	58.9	14.5
No course in desired subject	18.8	74.6	14.0
Too long to get a degree	12.6	81.2	10.2
Inability to specialize	13.8	69.0	9.5
Care of children	16.5	48.2	8.0
Won't help job prospects	6.8	74.1	5.0

FIG. 5 Reasons for not applying classified by frequency of response and the proportion planning to apply to the O.U. in a future year

a) The percentage planning to apply to the O.U. in a future year

b) The percentage mentioning each reason

	High (74.2-45.9%)	Medium (45.0-35.3%)	Low (31.6-18.8%)
High (29.4-12.6%)	"Care of children" "Not enough time available for studying each week"	"Would not be able to attend Summer School" "Financial commitment too great"	"No courses offered in subjects in which I am interested" "Insufficient opportunity to specialize in a particular subject"
Medium (11.9-6.4%)	"Other domestic demands" "Have changed job/ job responsibilities" "Type of job/hours of work will make O.U. study very difficult"	"No BBC2 television available" "No VHF radio available" "Not enough details about courses in the "Guide" "Possible non-recognition of O.U. degree by professional bodies"	"An O.U. course/ degree would not help my job prospects"
Low (6.2-2.9%)	"Likely to be overseas in January 1975" "Teacher in probationary year"	"No study centre near home, unable to attend" "Care of other dependents"	"Courses too difficult" "Would prefer face-to-face tuition" "Health difficulties"

4. Conclusion

At the moment application figures for the Open University appear to have settled at around 50,000 per year. As there are 20,000 places or less available each year for new students, lack of demand would not seem to be a pressing problem. The non-appliers question may be seen as being largely irrelevant at the moment.

However, enquiries and applications are down somewhat for 1976 courses. Although it is very early days, it is possible that the peak in demand has passed. The pool of prospective applicants may be growing smaller as unsuccessful applicants from previous years form an increasing percentage of current applicants. The increase in student fees may well be deterring large numbers of first-time applicants. On the other hand, as this report demonstrated, there is evidence that some people do not apply because they realize that they will not be successful under the "first come, first served" admissions policy. This might lead one to expect a fairly constant level of demand, at least for a number of years, with the number of applications being related to the number of available places.

In terms of absolute numbers the non-appliers problem may grow or diminish over the coming years. However, the results outlined in this report suggest that who the non-appliers are and why they do not apply are also important questions. The answers constitute a further challenge to the proclaimed "openness" of the Open University. In particular the results should lead to a further consideration of such topics as compulsory summer school attendance, cost, workload and course provision. These factors, together with others mentioned in this report, will continue to make the University less "open" for women, for blue collar workers, for the old and for those who completed their full-time education at an early age.

FOOTNOTES

1. The Open University: Report of the planning committe to the Secretary of State for Education & Science. H.M.S.O., 1969

2. See for instance Knowledge & awareness of the Open University McIntosh N.E., 1971 (Internal paper) & Awareness of the Open University among the general public: trends over the period May 1971 to April 1976 Swift B., 1976 (Prepared for the Public Relations Committee)

3. People who decide not to apply to the Open University Woodley A. & McIntosh N.E., 1974 (Prepared for the Admissions Committee and the Public Relations Committee)

4. Report of the planning committee Op. cit.

5. A research project carried out at the University of Mid-America suggests that this is unlikely. People who decided not to enrol on SUN (State University of Nebraska) "distance" courses were asked to indicate all reasons and the most important one. The rank order of the four most important reasons for not enrolling was exactly the same as for the four most frequently mentioned. Interestingly enough the two single reasons most frequently mentioned were "cost" (36%) and "not enough time" (27%) Working paper No. 6. An exploration into reasons for non-enrollment in SUN courses after requesting information about SUN Walsh P.L., University of Mid-America, 1975

PLEASE DON'T THROW THIS AWAY—but read it and if you decide **NOT TO APPLY TO THE UNIVERSITY** this year, complete it and post it back to us. It doesn't need a stamp.

The *Guide for Applicants* is sent every year to a large number of people who do *not* finally decide to return a completed application form. In many cases we do not hear from them again. It will help us in our planning if we know more about the people who decided not to apply at present and what particular factors may have prevented them. Please fill in these few questions and post this card back to us. (Returning it does not, of course, prevent you changing your mind about applying.)

Thank you very much. *(Please put a tick in the appropriate box, or write the answer in the space provided.)*

DID ANY OF THESE FACTORS AFFECT YOUR DECISION NOT TO APPLY? (you may mark more than one)

1 The nature of the courses offered
(a) No courses offered in subjects in which I am interested (If so, name subjects: _____) ☐ 1
(b) Insufficient opportunity to specialize in a particular subject ☐ 2
(c) Courses too difficult ☐ 3
(d) Not enough details given about courses in *Guide for Applicants* ☐ 4
(e) Possible non-recognition of OU degree by professional bodies ☐ 5

2 The teaching methods
(a) Would not be able to attend Summer School ☐ 1
(b) No BBC2 television available ☐ 2
(c) No VHF radio available ☐ 3
(d) No study centre near home, not able to get to study centre ☐ 4
(e) Would prefer face-to-face tuition, normal college ☐ 5

3 Personal/domestic factors
(a) Care of children ☐ 1
(b) Care of other dependents ☐ 2
(c) Other domestic demands ☐ 3
(d) Not enough time available for studying each week ☐ 4
(e) Would take too long to get a degree ☐ 5
(f) Health difficulties ☐ 6
(g) Financial commitment too great ☐ 7
(h) Likely to be overseas in January 1975 ☐ 8

4 Work situation
(a) Teacher in probationary year ☐ 1
(b) Have changed job/job responsibilities ☐ 2
(c) Type of job/hours of work (e.g. shift work) will make OU study very difficult ☐ 3
(d) An OU course/degree would not help my job prospects ☐ 4

5 Other plans for education
(a) Decided to do a preparatory course/studies this year ☐ 1
(b) Decided to do other part-time course this year ☐ 2
(c) Decided to do other full-time course this year ☐ 3
(d) Plan to apply to OU in a future year ☐ 4

6 The *Guide for Applicants* requested for reasons other than wanting to apply for admission
(a) General interest in the OU ☐ 1
(b) Professional interest in the teaching system of the OU ☐ 2
(c) For reference purposes, e.g. Librarian, Personnel Manager, etc. ☐ 3

7 Any other reasons for not applying (please write in) _____

8 Have you applied to the OU previously? ☐ 1 Yes ☐ 2 No

9 From whom did you request the *Guide for Applicants*?
(a) Admissions office ☐ 1
(b) Regional office ☐ 2
(c) Sent by OU ☐ 3
(d) Obtained from friend/colleague ☐ 4
(e) Other (write in) _____ ☐ 5

10 FINALLY, please enter
(a) The name of county (borough) in which you live _____ ☐

(b) Your age on 1 January 1975

Under 21	21–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65 & over
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

(c) Your sex _____ Male ☐ 1 _____ Female ☐ 2

(d) Your occupation _____ ☐

(e) At what age did you complete your full-time education?

15 & under	16	17	18	19	20	21 & over
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

11 Any other comments? _____